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**The Thesis Committee for Michael Roger Langlais Certifies that this is the
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Relationship Deterioration: Descriptions and Implications

Approved by Supervising Committee:

Edward R. Anderson, Supervisor

Catherine A. Surra, Co-Supervisor

Marci E. G. Gleason

Relationship Deterioration: Descriptions and Implications

by

Michael Roger Langlais, B.A.

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Relationship Deterioration: Descriptions and Implications

Michael Roger Langlais, M.A.

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Supervisors: Edward R. Anderson and Catherine A. Surra

Ending a relationship is a common and often difficult experience for adolescents and young adults who are dating (Furman & Wehner, 1997). Yet, little is known about how romantic relationships deteriorate prior to breakup (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Duck, 1981). The main goal of this study is to develop a definition of relationship deterioration that delineates the process of deterioration, by specifying a beginning and end point of deterioration and identifying characteristics that distinguish deterioration from breakup. Data for this study comes from the University of Texas Tracing Relationships and Commitment study (UT-TRAC), which contains 464 participants (232 heterosexual couples) who graphed changes in commitment over a 9-month period providing reasons describing each change. Deterioration, as defined as declines in commitment, was described by both partners in a romantic dyad in 90 couples whereas 75 individuals described deterioration and their romantic partner did not. A coding manual was created and pilot-tested to measure frequency and intensity of the four characteristics of deterioration in participant's descriptions of changes in commitment. The current investigation used multi-level modeling separately for couples experiencing

deterioration (to control for the dyadic nature of the data) and individuals whose partner did not report declines in commitment. Survival analyses using logistic regressions (Singer & Willett, 2003) were applied to measure how the characteristics of deterioration could predict breakup. Results of the analyses revealed that participants who experienced a breakup were more likely to report relationship deterioration, particularly for *couples* where both individuals described deterioration. Hierarchical linear models revealed that more frequent amounts of the deterioration characteristics was associated with deterioration as compared to pre-deterioration. However, intensity of the characteristics was not significant in differentiating between deterioration and pre-deterioration. In comparing deterioration with breakup, frequency of the deterioration characteristics predicted breakup only in descriptions of alternative partners, whereas intensity of the all four deterioration characteristics predicted breakup ranging from 37% (more intense scores of relational uncertainty) to 74% (more intense scores of alternative partners for an individual's partner). Implications of this study will be in terms of commitment theory in order to further understand relationship processes.

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Relationship Deterioration: Descriptions and Implications

Introduction

Ending a relationship is a common and often difficult experience for young adults who are dating. Eighty-five percent of adult Americans have experienced at least one breakup of a romantic relationship, with 60% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 34 reporting at least one breakup in the past ten years (Battaglia, Richard, Datterer, & Lord, 1998; Gardyn, 2003). Yet, little is known about how romantic relationships deteriorate prior to breakup (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; Duck, 1981). Although research on breakup acknowledges that breakup is a process, research has focused on breakup as an outcome, rather than a progression. The focus on the end point of the breakup process has left a gap in knowledge about the process of deterioration that precedes breakup. The main goal of this study is to develop a definition of relationship deterioration that delineates the process of deterioration, by specifying a beginning and end point of deterioration and identifying characteristics that distinguish deterioration from breakup.

Accomplishing this goal will improve theory development by explicating and operationalizing relationship deterioration. A more nuanced definition of deterioration will allow for more consistent and precise research concerning the entire relationship process, particularly in the area of the downfall of relationships. To develop a definition of deterioration, I draw from models of romantic breakup to establish a timeframe in which deterioration occurs. Next, I combine information from the breakup models with theories of commitment to flesh out characteristics of the period of relationship deterioration. Finally, I test the components of my definition of relationship deterioration

using longitudinal data from a study in which couples discuss changes in commitment to wed.

Understanding Deterioration: Models of Breakup

Researchers have described breakup as the ending of romantic attachment (Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Chen, 2008); a redefinition of the relationship from the couple level to the individual level (Slotter, Gardner, & Finkel, 2010); or the ending or dismemberment of the relationship (Duck, 1981). The literature on breaking up has shifted from viewing breakup as an event (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Davis, 1973; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976) to viewing it as a process (Baxter, 1984; Lee, 1984). Because the process of breakup encompasses the event of breaking up and the process of deterioration that occurs prior to breakup, I review models of breakup as a starting point for understanding relationship deterioration.

Duck (1981; 1982) was one of the first researchers to theorize about the process of breaking up. His model of breakup included five stages. The first stage is the *breakdown of the relationship*, described as dissatisfaction with the relationship and the partner. The second stage, termed the *intra-psychic stage*, involves measuring the costs and benefits of being in the relationship with the current partner. Next, the couple decides together whether to remain in the relationship or abandon it, which Duck calls the *dyadic phase*. Fourth, the *social phase* is characterized by publicizing the relationship decision of staying together or not. Last is the *grave dressing stage*, which includes individuals' getting over their former partner and adapting to their new role as single individuals (Duck, 1982).

Drawing on Duck's process of breaking up, other researchers have formulated their own models of breakup. For example, Lee (1984) expanded on Duck's model by introducing an exposure and negotiation phase in substitution of Duck's dyadic phase. Lee's model contained five stages, the first of which is *discovery of the problem*, where individuals experience dissatisfaction and assess the weaknesses and strengths of the relationship. The second stage, *exposure*, involves confronting the partner about the weaknesses of the relationship and the reasons for dissatisfaction. Third, the stage of *negotiation* involves a discussion of each person's needs and evaluation of each person's point of view with the goal of deciding whether or not to remain in the relationship. The fourth stage, *resolution*, occurs when a decision of whether or not to end the relationship is made on the basis of the analysis from prior stages. Finally, individuals experience the stage of *transformation*, which involves coping with the decision to remain in or exit the relationship (Lee, 1984).

Reed (2007) introduced a model of breakup in which the process of breaking up is initiated by stress. First, individuals in the relationship experience *stress* that triggers the beginning of the breakup process. The initial stress that activates the breakup process is either external to the romantic relationship, such as poor living conditions or work problems, or internal, such as interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. Stress spurs a *problem incident*, such as an argument or fight, where individuals attempt to cope with the stressor. After this stage, the individuals go through a *relationship crisis*. During this stage the individuals within the relationship decide whether or not to remain a couple (Reed, 2007).

The models of breakup provide implicit information about relationship deterioration; however, the focus on describing the process of breaking up has led to an incomplete definition of what deterioration is. Although Duck (1981) distinguished between breakup and deterioration, by referring to the breakdown of a relationship (what I will call relationship deterioration) that concludes with the dissolution of the relationship (breakup), deterioration is predominantly an implied precursor to breakup, rather than a construct that is explicitly defined and examined (Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008; Sprecher, 1994). Because much of the previous research on breaking up has not distinguished between relationship deterioration and breakup, researchers sometimes describe the period of deterioration as synonymous with breaking up. For example, some studies have asked participants to describe their breakup experience, where participants discuss not only the breakup, but also everything associated with the relationship's downfall (Connolly & McIsaac, 2009; Cupach & Metts, 1986; Slotter, Gardner, & Finkel, 2010; Tashiro & Frasier, 2003). Distinguishing between breaking up and deteriorating has been and still is problematic.

The focus on describing breakup rather than relationship deterioration has implications for defining deterioration. Although aspects of the models of breakup help to form a definition of deterioration, the lack of research on how breakup and deterioration are distinct creates a need to look beyond the models of breakup to fully define deterioration. An appropriate area to review in order to clearly define deterioration is theories of commitment. Commitment encompasses wanting to continue a relationship (Kelley et al., 1983; Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988; Surra & Hughes, 1997), where deterioration is a period in which individual's desire to continue the relationship

decreases. Accordingly, examining theories of commitment, particularly during times of instability, provides a way to differentiate between breakup and deterioration. In the next section, I discuss conclusions about deterioration that can be drawn from the models of breakup and how commitment theories facilitate a more complete definition of relationship deterioration.

Combining Models of Breakup and Commitment Theory to Define Relationship

Deterioration

One prominent conclusion about deterioration that can be drawn from the models of breakup is that breakup is preceded by deterioration. This assumption has multiple implications for creating a complete definition of deterioration. First, to the extent that deterioration occurs before breakup, the descriptions of what occurs prior to individuals breaking up should be characteristics of deterioration. Second, the models of breakup provide preliminary insight into when deterioration begins and ends.

When romantic relationships end, they commonly experience instability. The models of breakup have in common the idea that before a breakup occurs, a relationship shows signs of instability impacting the long-term continuation of the relationship (Baxter, 1986; Lee, 1984; Sprecher, 1994). Instability results in negative changes for relationships where one or both individuals in the relationship question the future of the relationship. Thus, deterioration is a period in which individuals experience some form of instability or change in the desire to maintain the relationship.

Based on this assumption, commitment is a central component of deterioration. Commitment is described as the decision to persist in a relationship (Johnson, 1991) or an attachment to a relationship with the intent of staying for the foreseeable future (Rusbult,

1983). Basically, commitment refers to relationship permanence and the desire to continue the relationship. Likewise, commitment involves interpersonal and dyadic aspects of the relationship that affects its stability (Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988; Surra & Bohman, 1991). During deterioration, a time of instability, individuals question the long-term status of their relationship, in other words, their commitment to the relationship. Therefore, in order to understand deterioration, I must explore how commitment levels change during deterioration more specifically.

Examining deterioration as a period of changing commitment provides a timeline for identifying when deterioration begins and ends. Because deterioration occurs when people question their commitment to the relationship, the period of deterioration should begin when commitment declines. This assumption is consistent with the break up models, which state that breakup is commonly initiated by some form of dissatisfaction with the relationship. For example, Duck (1981) argues that dissatisfaction is the beginning of the process of breaking up. Lee's (1984) first stage in her breakup model is the discovery of dissatisfaction. After some event or behavior initiates feelings of dissatisfaction, relationships become unstable, couples feel stressed, and individuals invest less time and resources in their relationships, which all influence decreases in commitment (Reed, 2007; Rusbult, 1983). Accordingly, the period of deterioration begins when commitment decreases.

Although the models of breakup have focused on changes in satisfaction as a precursor to breaking up, examining changes in commitment provides multiple advantages for defining and measuring deterioration. First, commitment is a more proximal measure of deterioration than satisfaction. According to the investment model

of commitment, satisfaction is one component of commitment (Rusbult, 1983).

Additionally, commitment provides a more comprehensive understanding of deterioration than does satisfaction. Whereas satisfaction encompasses people's subjective evaluations of romantic relationships in terms of the degree of positivity and negativity, commitment results from individual, relational, and structural factors in a relationship (Rusbult, 1983; Surra, Arizzi, Asmussen, 1988). As such, measuring deterioration as a period of decreasing commitment, rather than decreased satisfaction, provides a theoretically strong and more comprehensive understanding of the period of deterioration.

Where declining commitment levels reflect the beginning of relationship deterioration, the end of deterioration occurs when commitment levels cease to decline. Consistent between Duck, Lee, and Reed's models of breakup is the idea that the process of breaking up either leads to a couple breaking up or the decision to remain in the relationship, whether openly discussed between the individuals or not (Baxter, 1986; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). From a commitment perspective, the decision of whether to break up or maintain the relationship manifests in different patterns of changing commitment levels, creating three possible outcomes for the end point of deterioration. First, people may break up and cease commitment to the relationship (Duck, 1982). In that case, the breakup ends the period of deterioration. Another possibility is that people could decide to remain in the relationship. In this scenario, commitment may increase or be maintained at a steady, low level (Dindia, 2000). Taken together, the period of deterioration ends when people break up or commitment stops decreasing, either through an increase in commitment or stabilization of low levels of commitment.

In summary, breakup is preceded by a period of deterioration, which is characterized by declines in commitment. The period of deterioration begins with a decline in commitment within a relationship. Deterioration ends when individuals break up or declines in commitment cease. From this, I define deterioration as a period of declining commitment that ends with breakup, maintenance of the relationship at a lower, but sustained level of commitment, or an increase in commitment.

Although these claims are based on theory, the lack of empirical testing requires further examination of these claims. Building a foundation of knowledge about deterioration requires examining not only changing commitment levels of individuals who have broken up, but also a description of commitment levels of those who experience deterioration. For example, prior to deterioration, a period I will label as pre-deterioration, couples may experience either an increase or a steady level of commitment. Furthermore, some individuals may experience multiple periods of deterioration, which may influence their behaviors in different ways than individuals who experience only one period of deterioration. Accordingly, as a foundation for understanding deterioration, I forward the following research questions:

RQ1: What percentage of relationships that breakup experience a period of deterioration that is characterized by decreasing levels of commitment?

RQ2: Of the individuals whose relationships deteriorate, what percentage experience a period of pre-deterioration that is characterized by steady commitment levels rather than an increase?

RQ3: Of the individuals whose relationships deteriorate, what percentage experience multiple periods of deterioration rather than a single episode of deterioration?

Characteristics of Relationship Deterioration

Beyond understanding the start and end points of deterioration, a full definition of relationship deterioration requires an inclusion of characteristics that explain the period of deterioration. The models of breakup suggest characteristics that may be key to understanding relationship deterioration. According to Duck (1982), at the beginning of the breakup process, couples consider reducing intimacy levels, psychologically withdrawing, and questioning the worth of their relationship. Furthermore, Duck (1982) and Reed (2007) argue that when individuals are less committed to their own relationships, they tend to seek out alternative partners, or are more open to the idea of getting into a new relationship. Based on these ideas, decreased interactions with a romantic partner, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners may be key characteristics of deterioration. In the following sections, I define each characteristic, describe how the characteristic involves decreasing commitment, and explain how the characteristic can influence breakup.

Decreased Interaction with a Partner

The idea of decreasing interaction as part of relationship deterioration is highlighted in multiple models. As mentioned first by Duck (1982), and reinforced by Lee (1984), after individuals experience a dissatisfying stimulus in their relationship, they seek to reduce the amount of time and interaction they have with their partner. Individuals decrease interactions with their partner when they spend less time together,

avoid each other in public settings, and make excuses for not going out together (Honeycutt, Cantrill, & Allen, 1992). Taking all of this into consideration, decreased interactions with one's partner are defined as the purposeful reduction of the amount of time an individual spends with their partner.

The presence of decreased interactions with one's partner is a clear indicator of deterioration as evidenced by the relationship's decreasing commitment levels. Decreased interactions co-occur with declining commitment and are more frequent. In Knapp's (1984) model of coming apart, couples go through the process of breaking up by becoming more independent from their partner by decreasing the amount of time they spend together. As such, decreases in physical interaction and communication with a romantic partner are a sign of diminishing commitment; the more individuals' commitment decreases, the more they differentiate themselves from their partner by avoiding contact (Knapp, 1984). Furthermore, decreases in interactions occur because of conflict or awkward communication with the partner, which is associated with declines in commitment levels to the relationship (Welch & Rubin, 2002). Lee (1984) found that avoiding a romantic partner or absence of discussion on issues of discontent led couples to decrease their investment in a relationship. Taken together, this suggests that individuals may reference decreased communication and physical interaction with a partner more often during deterioration than prior to deterioration.

Not only do people interact less during deterioration, but the amount of decreased interactions may be associated with greater likelihood of a couple breaking up. In an investigation on college students, Hill, Rubin, and Peplau (1976) found that couples who did not spend as much time together as they preferred were more likely to break up than

those who saw each other regularly. Also, in an empirical study of undergraduate college students, Felmlee and her colleagues (1990) found that decreases in commitment are correlated with the number of hours per week a couple spends together and is predictive of higher breakup rates. When couples spend less time interacting, there are fewer opportunities to repair or maintain the relationship (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009). When an individual seeks to spend less time with their partner, the individual is less likely to seek a future with their partner to the extent that commitment declines within the relationship, leading some couples to terminate their relationship.

Relational Uncertainty

Uncertainty about relationships arises when individuals lack information about themselves and others (Knobloch, 2008) resulting in an inability to predict the behavior, thoughts, and feelings of others (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In the context of ongoing relationships, the lack of confidence has been labeled relational uncertainty, which is defined as “the degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement within interpersonal relationships” (Knobloch, 2008, pg. 139). According to Knobloch and Solomon (1999), relational uncertainty stems from three sources: self, partner, and relationship. Self-uncertainty involves questions that individuals have about their own participation in the relationship. Partner uncertainty encompasses doubts about a partner’s feelings and commitment to the relationship. Last, relationship uncertainty includes questions individuals have about the relationship itself, separate from self and partner issues (Knobloch, 2008; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). The concept of relational

uncertainty is different from the basic concept of uncertainty, because doubts extend beyond initial interactions of a relationship to the full length of the relationship.

Research from a variety of perspectives has shown that relational uncertainty is associated with decreased commitment (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Theiss & Solomon, 2008). Theoretically, relational uncertainty stems from questioning the permanence and future of a relationship, which is a central component of commitment (Surra & Bohman, 1991). Furthermore, research of communication processes between college students has shown that students who did not communicate with their partner frequently became more uncertain about their relationship and reported decreases in commitment (Guerrero, Anderson, & Afifi, 2007). Finally, research on relationship schemas reveal that individuals become uncertain about their relationships when they increase the number of attributions used to explain certain relationship behaviors, which is negatively associated with commitment levels (Surra & Bohman, 1991). Taken together, this body of research suggests that relational uncertainty may be a key characteristic of deterioration. Therefore, more regular experiences of relational uncertainty should be associated with relationship deterioration rather than the interval prior to deterioration.

Experiencing relational uncertainty can also impact commitment in such a way that leads couples to breakup. Arriaga and colleagues (2006) studied relational uncertainty by measuring doubts through fluctuations in relationship commitment within a 6-month period of time. Higher numbers of fluctuations in commitment revealed individual's relational uncertainty, which led some couples to breakup (Arriaga, 2001; Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006). Parks and Adelman (1983) measured how certain college students were in their dating relationships and found that uncertainty made

the romantic partner appear more unattractive and increased the likelihood that the relationship ended. Prior research has also shown that uncertainty, regardless of commitment, is a predictor of breaking up. In the study by Arriaga and colleagues (2006), the researchers found that couples who displayed some certainty about their relationship, yet had stable levels of poor relationship quality, were more likely to stay together than those who were uncertain about their relationship. Taken together, empirical and theoretical evidence reveal that high levels of relational uncertainty may lead to greater likelihood of breaking up.

Alternative Partners

Another significant aspect of declining commitment is the idea of seeing and dating other people. An alternative partner is described as an attractive option individuals perceive to have if they were not in the current relationship (Rusbult, 1980; 1983; VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009). Options may include a new partner, reuniting with an old partner, or being single. Alternative partners are typically viewed as threats to relationships and are common with declines in commitment (Duck, 1982; VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009).

Theoretical evidence gives support to the relationship between alternative partners and deterioration. According to social exchange theory, individual's commitment to their relationship is partially a function of weighing the costs and benefits of the relationship (Emerson, 1976). The perception that the benefits of an alternative partner outweigh the costs of staying in the relationship is associated with decreasing commitment levels. As mentioned by Duck (1982), Reed (2007), and Rusbult (1983), when individuals are less committed to their relationship, they are more likely to seek out alternatives to their

current relationship. In a study measuring attentiveness to alternative partners, higher attention was negatively correlated with commitment and investment in the relationship (Miller, 2008). Similarly, Miller and Simeon (2005) measured attention to alternative partners and commitment with undergraduate students in a three-month time span and found that after an instance of dissatisfaction, individuals who paid more attention to an alternative partner were more likely to report decreased commitment within the relationship. Another empirical study found that not paying attention to alternative partners increases commitment and relationship stability within couples (Maner, Rouby, & Gonzaga, 2008). Consequently, increased amounts of the attention to alternative partners should be associated with relationship deterioration.

Generally, researchers support the idea that attention to alternative partners may lead to breakup (Miller, 2002; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009). One study revealed that routine attention to alternatives results in relatively low levels of commitment to an individual's current partner that typically leads couples to end their relationships (Miller, 2002). Baxter (1986) and Connolly and McIsaac (2009) used self-reports to show that alternative partners were one of the major reasons participants ended their romantic relationship. Also, Dailey and colleagues (2009) found that individuals who continued to seek out other dating partners while in a relationship were more likely to breakup with their current partner. The empirical and theoretical evidence support the idea that alternative partners decrease commitment and influences breakup rates.

Testing the Characteristics of Deterioration

By drawing on information from the models of breakup and theories of commitment, I have identified three characteristics that are key factors in understanding what occurs during relationship deterioration. To the extent that deterioration is defined as a period of decreasing commitment, it should also be characterized by decreased interaction with a romantic partner, increases in relational uncertainty and involvement with alternative partners. Consequently, individuals should report greater decreased interaction with a dating partner and increased relational uncertainty and involvement with alternative partners during deterioration than prior to the period of deterioration.

In this study, I examine peoples' reports of why their commitment to wed a dating partner changed over a 9-month period. For those who experience a period of deterioration, or a decline in commitment to wed, I predict that references to decreased interaction, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners will increase during relationship deterioration compared to pre-deterioration. The increases in these characteristics can be measured in two ways: frequency of mentions of the characteristics of deterioration and intensity of the characteristics. Frequency is a measure of how often individuals describe incidents of decreased interaction, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners during deterioration. Intensity is an index of how severe each mention of the characteristics of deterioration is. Measuring the frequency of these characteristics in statements of individuals experiencing deterioration and evaluating the intensity of these statements both before and during deterioration can help support their involvement with relationship deterioration. Therefore I present the following hypotheses:

H1: The period of deterioration is characterized by (a) a decrease in interactions with one's partner, (b) an increase in relational uncertainty, and (c) an increase in involvement with alternative partners as compared to pre-deterioration.

H2: The period of deterioration is characterized by more intense statements of (a) decrease interactions with one's partner, (b) relational uncertainty, and (c) involvement with alternative partners as compared to pre-deterioration.

Using Characteristics of Deterioration to Predict Breakup

In addition to providing greater clarification to the definition of relationship deterioration, examining the characteristics of deterioration addresses a limitation of previous models of breakup. The models of breakup suggest that deterioration leads to breakup; however, deterioration ends with the decision to either breakup, maintain, or repair the relationship. Therefore, deterioration may not always lead to breakup. The models of breakup do not explain why or how individuals experience deterioration and not breakup; however, the presence of large amounts or extreme experiences of decreased interactions with an individual's partner, relational uncertainty, and involvement with alternative partners may be able to predict relationship breakup. If the characteristics of deterioration are low in frequency or low in intensity, then breakup may not occur. More formally stated:

H3: Couples whose relationships are deteriorating are more likely to break up than stay together if they report more frequent statements of (a) decreased interactions (b) relational uncertainty and (c) alternative partners.

H4: Couples whose relationships are deteriorating are more likely to breakup than stay together if they report more intense statements of (a) decreased interactions (b) relational uncertainty and (c) alternative partners.

To this point, I have focused on understanding what occurs during deterioration and how the characteristics of deterioration influence whether or not couples breakup; however, I have not addressed what happens to couples that deteriorate, but do not breakup. While the period of post-deterioration is not within the scope of this project, my examination of deterioration may provide an initial examination of how characteristics of deterioration influence outcomes in relationships. Couples stop deteriorating when their commitment stops declining, which results in either repairing their commitment or maintaining stable, but lower levels of commitment. Although there is a lack of theoretical or empirical evidence to suggest that the characteristics of deterioration may predict whether people maintain or repair their relationship, it is possible that factors associated with deterioration may influence later changes in commitment. As a foundation for understanding how deterioration influences post-deterioration changes in commitment, I forward the following research questions:

RQ4: Are couples who experience deterioration, but do not breakup, more likely to repair rather than maintain their commitment if they report less frequent statements of (a) decreased interactions with their partner (b) relational uncertainty and (c) involvement with alternative partners?

RQ5: Are couples who experience deterioration, but do not breakup, more likely to maintain or repair their commitment if they report less intense statements

statements of (a) decreased interactions with their partner (b) relational uncertainty and (c) involvement with alternative partners?

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that relationship deterioration is clearly a separate construct from breaking up (Duck, 1981; 1982). Relationship deterioration is the process that a couple experiences that may or may not lead to breakup and is characterized as a decrease in commitment to the relationship. Three characteristics have been identified to describe the period of relationship deterioration: decreased interaction with an individual's partner, increased relational uncertainty, and increased involvement with alternative partners. The presence of these three characteristics and the frequency and intensity with which a couple expresses them may influence whether or not a couple breaks up. Next, I describe a study that will help test the hypotheses concerning the definition of relationship deterioration and how the three characteristics differentiate relationship deterioration from breakup.

Method

Data for this study came from a 9-month longitudinal study, the University of Texas – Tracing Relationships and Commitment (UT-TRAC). Participants completed up to nine face-to-face interviews in monthly intervals. The first interview, Phase 1, involved gathering information about the relationship and lasted about an hour and a half to three hours. Phase 2 consisted of seven shorter interviews that lasted approximately fifteen to thirty minutes. The final interview, Phase 3, was similar to the first interview. Participants were paid \$20 for the first and third interviews and \$5 for each completed Phase 2 interview. All interviews were conducted separately for each member of the couple.

Participants

Participants were recruited through random digit dialing of phone numbers in a southwestern city of the United States. To qualify for the study, participants were required to be in a heterosexual dating relationship, had never been married, and were between 19 to 35-years old. The phone calls yielded 861 eligible individuals; of those eligible, 464 individuals and their partners agreed to participate and completed the first interview. The participant that was contacted by phone invited their romantic partner to be in the study and both individuals had to give consent. Individuals who declined to participate stated that they or their partner were too busy, not interested, or were unable or unwilling to participate for the entire study. In order to address the specific aims of this study, only the participants who reported a period of deterioration ($n = 255$, 90 couples and 75 individuals) were used. Of these 255 participants, 74 reported a breakup (more details to follow).

Procedures

During the first phase of this study, participants were asked to construct a graph of changes in the chance of marriage to their partner over the course of the relationship. Respondents were shown a blank graph, which displayed chance of marriage from 0% to 100% on the vertical axis. The time in months was on the horizontal axis. The chance of marriage was defined with the following description: “There may have been times when you have thought, with different degrees of certainty about the possibility of marrying [partner’s name]. These thoughts have been based on your ideas about eventually marrying [partner’s name] and on what you think have been [partner’s name’s] thoughts about marrying you. Taking both of these things into consideration, I will graph how the chance of marrying [partner’s name] has changed over the time you have had a relationship.” Participants were told that if they were certain they would never marry their partner, the chance of marriage would be 0%, but if they were certain they would marry their partner the chance would be 100%.

Participants reported their chance of marriage at the beginning of the relationship until the day of the assessment. Participants were asked when they were first aware that the chance of marriage had changed from its initial value and the percentage at the time of the change. When the new value was marked, participants were asked about the shape of the line that should connect the two points. The period of time covered by the line that connects the two points constitutes a *turning point*. After this line was drawn, the interviewer asked, “Tell me, in as specific terms as possible, what happened here from [date] to [date] that made the chance of marriage go [up/down] [__%]?” Participants were

asked, “Is there anything else that happened...” until they said, “No.” The transcripts of these accounts were used for this study.

Phase 2 had graphing procedures similar to those used at Phase 1, which continued for once a month for the next seven months and captured concurrent reports of commitment to marriage. During this phase, participants updated their information from the first interview. Specifically, participants were told what their reported chance of marriage was at the last interview and asked when the chance of marriage changed. The change in commitment to marriage was graphed and the participant described the slope, as well as the reasons behind the change in commitment as was done in Phase 1. The graphing procedure continued until the chance of marriage corresponded with the day of the interview.

Although changes in commitment were measured at Phase 1 and 2, I will be focusing only on the data from Phase 2. The Phase 1 transcripts provided a view of how individuals portrayed their relationship development and maintenance, but the descriptions are retrospective. While retrospective data are useful, they typically are less reliable than concurrent data and prone to bias (Ash, 2009; Bradfield & Wells, 2005; Widom, Raphael, DuMont, 2004). Therefore, for this study, to protect against these issues, I will be using the prospective transcripts from Phase 2 that describe why commitment changed within the relationship. During this procedure, participants were also asked whether or not they were still with their current partner or if a breakup had occurred. For those individuals who had broken up, they were given the option of continuing to graph their commitment to marriage to their former partner or to track commitment to marriage to a new partner, if applicable.

For this study I used data from the Phase 2 transcripts and chance of marriage graphs to test my research questions and hypotheses. First, I used the graphs to identify the period of decreasing commitment in order to create the subsample of participants who experienced deterioration. Second, I used information from the transcripts to distinguish changes in the characteristics that are present during deterioration that were not present before deterioration.

Distinguishing deterioration using the graphs. In order to divide my sample between those individuals who are in deteriorating relationships versus those who are not, I and another research assistant examined the chance of marriage graphs of all UT-TRAC participants ($n = 432$) from Phase 2. The period of deterioration, as measured on the graphs, begins when the commitment to marriage declines (see path C in *Figure 1*). Relationship deterioration continues until commitment levels off (Path D), commitment increases (path E), or the couple breaks up or reaches the end of the study. However, some participants could experience deterioration more than once. An example of a participant experiencing multiple periods of deterioration is present in *Figure 2*. In this presentation, a participant reports three nonconsecutive declines in commitment, which is different from *Figure 1*, in which the participant experiences one period of deterioration. For individuals who displayed multiple periods of deterioration, I focused on the first deterioration experience. The first experience of declining commitment as reported during Phase 2 for an individual provides the first concurrent description of the feelings, emotions, and interactions between the couple members that occurs when commitment decreases.

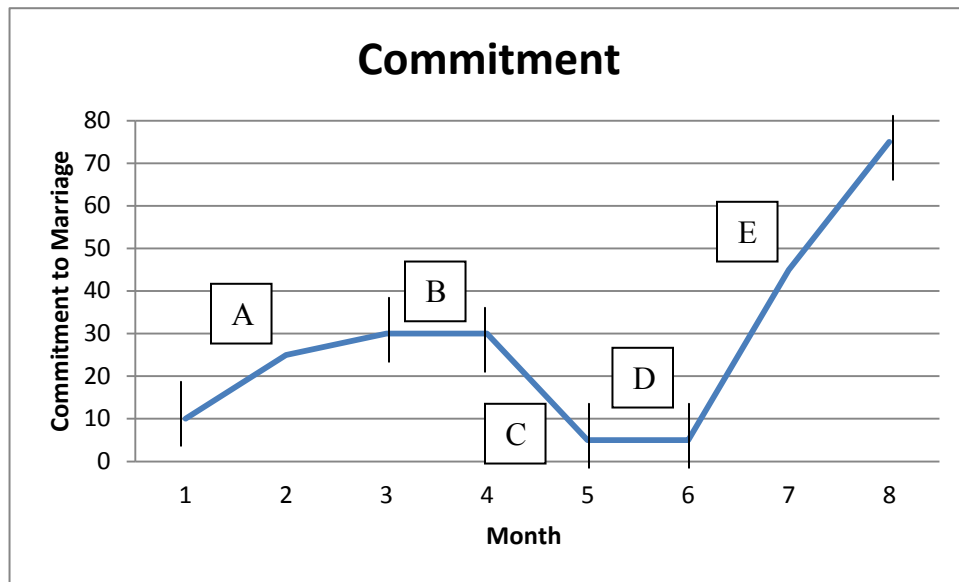


Figure 1. Different paths of pre-deterioration and post-deterioration during relationship deterioration. Path A reflects increasing commitment during pre-deterioration; path B displays maintaining commitment during pre-deterioration; path C portrays relationship deterioration; path D shows maintaining commitment levels during post-deterioration; and increasing commitment during post-deterioration is displayed by path E.



Figure 2. Some participants experienced multiple periods of deterioration. This graph portrays an individual who experienced three non-consecutive declines in commitment, resulting in three different periods of deterioration.

Distinguishing pre-deterioration from deterioration using the transcripts. In order to distinguish pre-deterioration from deterioration, I read the transcripts beginning at the first available Phase 2 transcript until I reached the first description of declining commitment. All information prior to the description of the first decline in commitment was labeled pre-deterioration. Everything that occurred during the descriptions of declining commitment was regarded as relationship deterioration. Deterioration ends in the transcripts when the participant described an increase in commitment, no changes in commitment following the decline, or the descriptions of declining commitment reached the end of Phase 2. Through this method, however, some participants described a decline in commitment during the first interview period, or no changes in commitment were described until a few months into the study, which resulted in commitment decreases. Because these participants did not describe any instances of increases in commitment prior to deterioration, they do not have a pre-deterioration transcript; however, they do have deterioration transcripts. In sum, there were 91 pre-deterioration transcripts and 255 deterioration transcripts.

Coded Measures

To assess how decreased interactions, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners are associated with deterioration, three undergraduate students coded the pre-deterioration and deterioration transcripts from Phase 2 of the UT-TRAC study. Research assistants were blind to the hypotheses and research questions and were trained on a

coding manual (see Appendix) through a pilot study using sample transcripts. Once reliability was established, each coder was given 15 transcripts weekly, with 5 transcripts overlapping between two coders to ensure reliability. Coders met weekly to discuss coding tasks. Disagreements between codes were discussed between the coders and me until a majority agreement was reached.

Research assistants used the coding manual to account for frequency of the characteristics of relationship deterioration. As part of a previous study, the transcripts were divided into thought units, which are described as complete thoughts, rather than sentences (for more details about the selection of thought units, see Surra & Hughes, 1997). First, coders counted the frequency of each code throughout each transcript. After tracking and listing each example of the code for all the transcripts in the study, research assistants were given a document with only the coded thought units identified in the first stage of coding. Coders used this document to code for intensity (the degree to which the characteristic was expressed) for each statement identified during frequency coding. The intensity scores were based on the scale given in the coding manual.

Decreased interactions with partner. This code was defined as spending less time with one's partner, communicating less with one's partner, or other descriptions of decreases in the amount of interaction, whether involving physical or emotional interactions. Frequency of this code was based on a count of thought units reflecting decreased interactions. Intensity of amount of interaction with partner was measured by a 1 to 3 scale, where 1 represented low intensity ("I guess we weren't talking on the phone as much"); 2 represented moderate intensity ("I felt that [he] was talking to me less and

less over the summer”); and 3 represented high intensity (“and we weren’t, um, speaking”).

Relational Uncertainty. This code was defined as doubts about the relationship or being unsure about the current state of the relationship. Frequency of this code was based on a count of thought units reflecting relational uncertainty. Intensity of relational uncertainty was measured by a 1 to 3 scale, where 1 represented low intensity (“Eventually that’s how I started havin’ my doubts just cause the way she acted that night and the way that I acted”); 2 represented moderate intensity (“I’m just not real sure where the relationship’s going”); and 3 represented high intensity (“I’m not sure he’s the one for me”).

Alternative Partners. This code was defined as an involvement with, anticipated involvement with, imagined involvement with, desired involvement, or either partner’s attributions about or reactions to alternative dating partners that pose a threat to the relationship. This code was broken down into two subcategories: alternative partners – self (referencing alternative partners for the individual being interviewed) and alternative – partner partners (referring to alternative partners to the participant’s significant other in the study). Frequency of this code was based on a count of thought units reflecting alternative partners – self and alternative partners - partner. Intensity of alternative partners was measured by a 1 to 3 scale, where 1 represented low intensity (Self: “I saw my old crush and we talked briefly and I was wonderin’ what it would be like if I was to date him instead”; Partner: “I know that he, he was, was thinking about her the entire time”); 2 represented moderate intensity (Self: “I’ve just been going out and meeting more people, meeting more guys that, you know, I might be interested in”; Partner: “I

was really pissed that she talked, or, yea talked to this one guy that I had never seen her with before”); and 3 represented high intensity (Self: “At this party, I had, actually made out with this other guy”; Partner: “[She] had spent the night with somebody that I know”).

Self-Report Measures

Stage of involvement. Breakup status was measured by a single item asked at each phase of the interview, “Which of the following stages best describes your relationship with [name of dating partner] right now? Response options were “casually dating,” “seriously dating,” “privately committed to marriage,” “formally engaged,” “married,” or “broken up”. If participants reported multiple breakups across the duration of the study, only the first breakup was used for this project ($n = 6$). Some participants may have re-entered a relationship in which a breakup was reported ($n = 6$), but commitment to marry the participant between the breakup and the renewal of the relationship was not recorded for these participants. Thus, the participants renewing their relationship were included in the study, but information after their first breakup was not used for data analysis.

Analytic Strategy

In order to answer my research questions and hypotheses, I used a variety of data analytic procedures. For Research Questions 1 through 3, because of the categorical nature of the variables and measuring participants group identification, I used χ^2 tests. Before addressing my hypotheses, I had to explore the dyadic nature of the data, because there are 90 couples in which both partners described deterioration out of the 255 participants in my study. To account for this I selected out the couples reporting

deterioration and made a dyadic dataset accounting for partners' frequency of characteristics in the transcripts as recommended by Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006). Using SAS PROC CORR (SAS Institute, 2003), I correlated couples' frequencies of each characteristic to test for independence of the data. Correlations of the characteristics of deterioration ranged from .71 to .75, meaning that the data is not independent and should be analyzed dyadically and separately from the individuals describing deterioration.

To address my first two hypotheses, I conducted analyses using hierarchical linear modeling techniques (HLM) for individuals and couples separately. Through this method, HLM techniques allow me to capture variation within and between participants (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). For the first hypothesis examining frequency of characteristics for individuals only, I used phase, whether pre-deterioration or deterioration as my level-1, within-person variable and relationship length for my level-2, between-couple variable to predict whether each characteristic was more frequent during deterioration rather than pre-deterioration (see equations 1 – 2).

$$(1) DI_{ik} = B_{0i} + B_{1i}(P_{ik}) + e_{ik}$$

$$(2) B_{0i} = B_{00} + B_{01}(R_i) + \mu_{0i}$$

The dependent variable DI_{ik} represents the deterioration characteristic of decreased interactions for individual i at time k ; P_{ik} represents phase, either pre-deterioration or deterioration; R_i is reported relationship length; and the residual components are represented by e_{ik} and μ_{0i} . I ran four separate models, one for each deterioration characteristic controlling for relationship length. The coefficient B_{0i} is the regression intercept for decreased interactions for individual i and represents the average frequency of decreased interactions for each participant. The between-individual level of

the model for the intercepts involves the sum of overall means (B_{00i}) and random effects (μ). This model was ran separately for each deterioration characteristic. The level-2 equation for B_{1i} is a fixed effect and therefore is equal only to the grand mean and therefore is not included.

A 3-level HLM model was used to analyze the dyadic data. In this instance, phase remained the within-individual variable as it was with individuals, however, gender was used as a second-level within-couple variable, and relationship length was the third-level, between-couple variable (see equations 3 – 5).

$$(3) DI_{ijk} = B_{0ij} + B_{1ij}(P_{ijk}) + e_{ijk}$$

$$(4) B_{0ij} = B_{00i} + B_{01i}(S_i) + \mu_{ij}$$

$$(5) B_{00i} = B_{000} + B_{001}(R_i) + \gamma_i$$

The dependent variable DI_{ijk} represents the deterioration characteristic of decreased interactions for individual i in couple j at time k . All variables remain the same as they were with the model used for individuals, except S_i , the second level variable, is the reported gender of the participant. Other level-2 and level-3 equations are fixed effects and would be equal only to the grand mean and therefore are not included. Separate models were run for each deterioration characteristic as was done with the individual models.

For the second hypothesis, HLM was used. Through this method, HLM techniques allow me to capture variation within and between participants. For individuals, I identified the intensity score as the dependent variable using phase, relational uncertainty, alternative partners – self, and alternative partners – partner as

level-1 variables. Relationship length was identified as a level-2 variable (see equations 6 – 7).

$$(6) I_{ik} = B_{0i} + B_{1i}(P_{ik}) + B_{2i}(RU_{ik}) + B_{3i}(APS_{ik}) + B_{4i}(APP_{ik}) + e_{ik}$$

$$(7) B_{0i} = B_{00} + B_{01}(R_i) + \mu_i$$

The dependent variable I_{ik} represents the intensity score across all deterioration characteristics for individual i at time k ; P_{ik} represents phase, either pre-deterioration or deterioration; RU_{ik} denotes intensity scores for relational uncertainty; APS_{ik} is the intensity score of alternative partner for the individual; APP_{ik} represents the intensity score of the participants partner's alternative partner involvement; R_{ik} is reported relationship length; and the residual components are represented by e_{ik} . The coefficient B_{0i} is the regression intercept for decreased interactions for individual i and represents the average frequency of decreased interactions for each participant. The between-individual level of the model for the intercepts involves the sum of overall means (B_{00i}) and random effects (μ). All other level-2 equations would be equal only to their grand mean as above and therefore are not included.

For couples, another 3-level model was used similar to the individual model. Gender was used as the second-level, within couple variable, whereas relationship length represented the between-couple, level-3 variable (see equations 8 – 10). All variables remain the same as they were with the model used for individuals, except S_i , the second level variable, is the reported gender of the participant. Other level-2 equations would be equal only to their grand mean and are not included.

$$(8) I_{ijk} = B_{0i} + B_{1ij}(P_{ijk}) + B_{2ij}(RU_{ijk}) + B_{3ij}(APS_{ijk}) + B_{4ij}(APP_{ijk}) + e_{ijk}$$

$$(9) B_{0ij} = B_{00i} + B_{01i}(S_i) + \mu_{ij}$$

$$(10) \quad B_{00i} = B_{000} + B_{001}(R_i) + \gamma_i$$

For hypotheses 3 and 4, I performed discrete-time survival analyses using binary logistic regressions following the recommendations of Singer and Willett (2003).

Discrete-time survival analysis assesses the probability that a randomly selected individual will experience an event (break-up) during the particular interval, in this case, months during Phase 2. Thus, the occurrence of break-up is the dependent variable in the survival analysis, and dummy variables representing each month of the study are included as predictor variables. The logistic regression coefficients for each month thus represent the baseline (logit) hazard for risk of breakup in that particular month. In addition, variables assessing either frequency or intensity of the characteristics of deterioration are included as independent variables. However, Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) describe that it is legitimate to ignore couple in this analysis, since observation of a breakup is the unit of analysis.

Research questions 4 and 5 involved binary logistic regressions, because the outcome variable was dichotomous (either increasing commitment or steady level of commitment). Therefore, the dependent variable was post-deterioration commitment changes, and the independent variables included either frequency or intensity of each deterioration characteristic.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for participants describing and not describing deterioration are presented in Table 1. The average age for each participant was 23.68 years old ($SD = 3.59$); however, there were significant mean differences across genders across groups. Males, both deteriorating and not deteriorating were significantly older than females who deteriorated, whereas females who did not deteriorate were not significantly older or younger than males, $F(431) = 5.147, p < .01$. There were no other significant mean differences in relationship length, race, education, or religion across groups.

Of the study sample, 255 participants experienced a decrease in commitment and 99 participants experienced a breakup. Of those who broke up, 25 (9% of the study sample) did not describe declines in commitment and were excluded from hypotheses testing since they did not experience deterioration, which provided a sample of 74 (29%) participants. There was no significant gender, race, education, or religious differences between participants who experienced a breakup versus those who did not. There was a statistically significant difference in gender with participants reporting deterioration $\chi^2(1, N = 431) = 6.19, p < .02$, where women were more likely than men to describe decreasing commitment.

As mentioned earlier, the deterioration sample needed to be separated into two groups in order to address the dyadic features of the data to answer the first two hypotheses. *Couples* who deteriorated are indicated as both individuals in the relationship describing decreasing commitment levels whereas *individuals* are classified as having only the participant reporting decreasing commitment levels. Descriptive characteristics

for *individuals* versus *couples* who deteriorated are presented in Table 2. *Individuals* and *couples* who deteriorated were not significantly different in age, relationship length, education, or race between men and women. Mean differences in religion for *individuals* were significantly different between males and females ($F(73) = 3.509, p < .05$), with females describing more Catholic or Atheist religious beliefs and males listing Protestant (such as Baptist, Methodist, etc.) as their primary religion, but not different for *couples*. In order to attend to the dyadic nature of my study sample, these two groups will remain separate when answering the first three research questions.

Main Analyses

The initial research questions for this study were based on theoretical claims that decreasing commitment ultimately leads to breakup. In order to empirically address the relationship between deterioration and breakup, I evaluated the percentage of participants who broke up who also experienced a period of decreasing commitment. I performed a χ^2 test comparing participants who did or did not experience decreasing commitment and whether or not they broke up. Results are presented in Table 3. There was a significant difference between these two groups, where participants who experienced a breakup were more likely to report relationship deterioration, particularly for *couples* where both individuals described deterioration, $\chi^2(1, N = 431) = 13.282, p < .001$.

Next, with the purpose of characterizing the entire process of relationship deterioration, I examined participant's commitment prior to the first report of relationship deterioration. I used *t*-tests to examine differences across genders and I used χ^2 tests to describe the association between pre-deterioration and breakup. I ran separate analyses for *individuals* and *couples*. Prior to the first concurrent explanation of decreasing

commitment levels, participants could describe three different patterns of commitment trajectories: steady levels of commitment (those neither increasing nor decreasing), increasing commitment, or neither (describing decreasing commitment at first time point). Of all the *individuals* (whose partner did not report deterioration) who experienced relationship deterioration ($N = 75$), 19 individuals did not experience a pre-deterioration phase due to reporting a decrease in commitment at the first assessment in the study (25.3%), 27 participants had steady levels of commitment prior to deterioration (36.0%), and 29 participants experienced an increase in commitment prior to deterioration (38.7%). When comparing these three different patterns of pre-deterioration with whether or not a breakup occurred, the χ^2 statistic was significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 75) = 6.787, p < .05$, meaning that *individuals* describing declining commitment levels during pre-deterioration were more likely to break up. For *couples* in which both participants described different pre-deterioration patterns ($N = 180$ individuals, 90 couples), 48 described declining commitment levels at the first assessment of the study (26.7%), 69 participants described steady levels of commitment prior to deterioration (38.3%), and 63 participants experienced increasing commitment levels prior to deterioration (35.0%). When comparing these three different patterns of pre-deterioration with whether or not a breakup occurred among deteriorating couples, the χ^2 statistic was not significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 180) = 4.244, p = .12$.

The third research question was concerned with comparing participants who experienced one period of deterioration versus multiple periods of deterioration. Of the 75 *individuals* experiencing decreasing levels of commitment but their partner did not, 47 (62.7%) described a singular instance of deterioration and 28 participants (37.3%)

described multiple periods of deterioration. Investigating whether or not experiencing multiple periods of deterioration influences breakup for *individuals*, a statistical difference was not found, $\chi^2(1, N = 75) = .360, p = .55$. As for *couples* when both described relationship deterioration, 111 participants described a single experience of deterioration across the study (61.7%), whereas 69 participants described more than one period of deterioration (38.3%). Examining whether or not experiencing multiple periods of deterioration influences breakup for *couples*, a statistical difference was not found, $\chi^2(1, N = 180) = .816, p = .37$.

Testing the Characteristics of Deterioration

The first hypothesis of my study states that the period of relationship deterioration, relative to the period of pre-deterioration is characterized by decreased interactions with a romantic partner, increased reports of relational uncertainty, and increased involvement with alternative partners, whether it is self or partner involved. In order to address this hypothesis, I conducted four hierarchical linear models, one for each characteristic of deterioration (i.e., Decreased Interactions, Relational Uncertainty, Alternative-Partner Self, and Alternative-Partner Other), using a time-varying dummy variable to identify pre-deterioration (0) and deterioration (1) phases. The coefficient for the time-varying dummy variable was treated as a random effect; thus, the effect of entering deterioration is similar to that of a within-individual slope coefficient, in that the size of the coefficient is allowed to vary randomly across persons. This analysis was performed separately for *individuals* and *couples* who were deteriorating. For *couples*, the analysis consists of three levels: within-person, within-couple, and between-couple. The results are presented in Table 4. The fixed effect for pre-deterioration vs.

deterioration phase was significant in all four models for both *individuals* and *couples*. Thus, when persons moved from pre-deterioration to deterioration each of the four characteristics became significantly more frequent (Couples: decreased interactions $B = .71, p < .001$; relational uncertainty $B = .90, p < .001$; alternative partners – self $B = .42, p < .001$; alternative partners – partner $B = .24, p < .001$; Individuals: decreased interactions $B = .62, p < .001$; relational uncertainty $B = .81, p < .001$; alternative partners – self $B = .43, p < .001$; alternative partners – partner $B = .09, p < .05$). My second hypothesis predicted that the period of deterioration would be characterized by more intense statements of decreased interactions, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners as compared to pre-deterioration. Because intensity was only coded when there was an occurrence of a code, the analyses for Hypothesis 2 are different from those of Hypothesis 1. For example, if a participant did not experience any relational uncertainty, the frequency count is zero, but there would be no corresponding intensity score. The data structure for the analysis for Hypothesis 2 is presented in *Figure 3*, which presents a hypothetical dataset that will help explain the analysis used for Hypothesis 2. The first four rows of this dataset are for participant 101. The first row occurred during the pre-deterioration phase, as indicated by the 0 in the pre vs. deterioration column. The columns for RU, APS, and APP are dummy codes that indicate the characteristic that was being rated. For the first row, because all three columns are 0, the intensity score of 1 indicates that this code was for decreased interactions. The next three rows for participant 101 belong to the deterioration phase and involve intensity codes for relational uncertainty (row 2) and alternative partner – self (rows 3 and 4). The last four rows correspond to intensity scores for participant 102, two of which came during pre-

deterioration and two came during deterioration. Thus, the coefficient in the hierarchical models for pre-deterioration vs. deterioration quantifies the main effect of moving to the deterioration phase on intensity, across all codes. The coefficients corresponding to RU, APS, and APP represent the intensity difference of that code relative to decreased interactions (i.e., the reference category).

ID	Intensity	RU	APS	APP	Pre vs. Deterioration
101	1	0	0	0	0
101	3	1	0	0	1
101	2	0	1	0	1
101	1	0	1	0	1
102	3	1	0	0	0
102	2	1	0	0	0
102	3	1	0	0	1
102	3	0	0	1	1

Figure 3. Hypothetical dataset for predicting the impact of intensity of each characteristic on whether or not deterioration occurred. RU represents relational uncertainty; APS stands for alternative partner – self; APP represents alternative partner – partner; and Pre vs. Deterioration is an indication of whether the code occurred during pre-deterioration, or during deterioration. The reference group is the code for decreased interactions.

As shown in Table 5, there were no significant increases in intensity from pre-deterioration to deterioration collapsing across codes for either *individuals* or *couples*.

Also, no other deterioration characteristics were significantly different from the reference group (decreased interactions).

The results of my first two hypothesis verified that there is an association between deterioration with the predicted characteristics and with breakup. Thus, I tested to distinguish the degree to which the frequency of the four characteristics of deterioration predict breakup. Hypothesis 3 states that higher frequencies of the deterioration characteristics will be predictive of breakup. In order to answer this hypothesis, I performed discrete-time survival analyses using binary logistic regressions following the recommendations of Singer and Willett (2003). Discrete-time survival analysis was chosen over continuous-time survival analysis because the break-up was identified by month of occurrence rather than day of occurrence. Thus, because there were only 8 possible values for time of break-up (i.e., months 1 – 8 of phase 2 data collection), the possibility of frequent ties is high, violating a basic assumption of continuous-time survival analysis (Singer & Willett, 2003). This analysis was conducted with both couples and individuals experiencing deterioration, because statisticians state that it is acceptable to ignore the dyadic nature of the data (Keiley & Martin, 2005; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

In the discrete-time method for survival analysis, each participant has as many rows as the number of months of the relationship, up to a maximum of 8 (the total number of months that phase 2 lasted). *Figure 4* displays the data structure for this analysis. As shown, participant 101 was in a relationship up to month 3, at which time a breakup occurred. Thus, participant 101's involvement in the relationship no longer continues. In contrast, participant 102 was in a relationship for the full 8 months of the

study, at which point the study ended, but the participant has not reported a breakup. In survival analysis terms, participant 102 represents a censored case: that individual may experience a breakup at some point in the future, but had remained in the pre-breakup phase throughout involvement in the study.

Following Singer & Willett's (2003) approach, the dummy variables representing month of occurrence are entered into a binary logistic regression with the event (breakup) as the categorical dependent variable. The coefficients for each month represent the logit-hazard associated with the probability of breakup for that particular month. In other words, they represent the baseline likelihood of breakup occurrence for that month. The coefficients associated with the predictor variables of decreased interactions, relational uncertainty, alternative partner – self, and alternative partner – partner thus represent the increase (or decrease) in logit-hazard relative to the baseline occurrence for that month.

ID	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	BU	DI	RU	APS	APP
101	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	7	1
101	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	7	1
101	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	3	7	1
102	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	0
102	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	0
102	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	0
102	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	0
102	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	0

102	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	5	0
102	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	2	5	0
102	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	2	5	0

Figure 4. Graphical demonstration of discrete-time survival analysis. Month represents each month of the study when a breakup occurred or did not occur. BU represents whether a breakup occurred (1) or not (0). DI, RU, APS, and APP represents frequency (or intensity) of each deterioration code: decreased interactions, relational uncertainty, alternative partner – self, alternative partner – partner, respectively.

The results of predicting breakup for deteriorating individuals as predicted by month of the study and frequency of the deterioration characteristics, while controlling for length of relationship, are presented in Table 6. The negative values for the *B* coefficients associated with the dummy variables for month of the study simply mean that the odds of breakup occurring in any particular month are quite low. There is some indication that breakups of individuals were more likely to be reported in the earlier months (Months 1 and 2) and the last month of the study (Month 7) as indicated by larger *B* coefficients, although the odds of breakup were still very low (as indicated by odds ratios well below 1). Length of relationship was not a predictor for breakup with individuals experiencing deterioration ($B = .01, p = .34$). The coefficients for frequency of alternative partners – self and alternative partners – partner ($B = .43, p < .01, B = .44, p < .01$, respectively) were significant, indicating that the likelihood of breakup increased significantly as the frequency of such statements increased. Specifically, the odds of breaking up were 54% and 56% higher for every subsequent mention of alternative partner – self and alternative partners – partner, correspondingly.

The fourth hypothesis described that more intense statements of the characteristics of deterioration lead to breakup. The same procedure used for hypothesis 3 was applied to address this prediction. Examining the lower portion of Table 6, all four characteristics were statistically significant: decreased interactions, $B = .47, p < .001$; relational uncertainty, $B = .31, p < .05$; alternative partners – self, $B = .46, p < .01$; alternative partners – partner, $B = .55, p < .001$. The odds ratios describe that an individual is 37% more likely to breakup with their partner when more intense statements of relational uncertainty are provided as the reason behind decreased commitment, 56-58% higher if statements were more intense for decreased interactions and for their own alternative partners, and 74% more likely to breakup for a partner's participation with an alternative partner. Length of relationship was not statistically significant in relation to intensity of deterioration characteristics and breakup ($B = .01, p = .45$).

Exploratory Analyses

In order to increase understanding about the process of deterioration, I asked two research questions regarding what happens after deterioration. Deterioration can only end if an individual experiences a breakup or if commitment increases or is maintained. Different frequencies or intensities of the deterioration characteristics may predict whether a couple increases their commitment or maintains steady levels of commitment. In order to answer this research questions, I ran a binary logistic regression, predicting that more frequent or more intense statements of the four deterioration characteristics would be related to different outcomes after deterioration if the participant remained in the relationship. Since I am predicting event occurrence based on discrete time, it is safe to run the regression with both *individuals* and *couples* (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

Table 7 displays that neither the frequency nor the intensity of the statements made in the study is statistically significant in predicting outcomes after deterioration.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to understand the process of relationship deterioration through examination of characteristics that were related to decreasing levels of commitment, as well as to investigate how this process is related to breakup. I hypothesized that frequent and intense statements of the four characteristics of relationship deterioration (decreased interactions with a romantic partner, relational uncertainty, and self and partner's involvement with a romantic alternative partner) would be related to decreasing levels of commitment and breakup. I also sought to answer questions concerning how pre- and post-deterioration characteristics are different from deterioration. My analyses revealed partial support for my hypotheses. Participants who reported more frequent statements of the four characteristics of deterioration experienced declining commitment levels, but the intensity of these statements was not related to commitment fluctuations. In predicting breakup based on the characteristics of deterioration, participants who reported more frequent statements about alternative partners were more likely to breakup. Also, reporting higher intensity scores of any of the deterioration characteristics was also more indicative of breakup. I explore implications of these results in the following sections.

Individuals who Deteriorate

The experience of relationship deterioration is unique across participants in this study, with some reporting single instances of deterioration as opposed to multiple instances, and some reporting increasing commitment, maintaining commitment, or decreasing commitment at the onset and offset of deterioration. However, a large majority of participants in the study report increasing commitment after deterioration,

rather than maintaining steady levels of commitment. Primarily, I found empirical support that those individuals who are breaking up experience declining periods of commitment, which is consistent with theoretical literature (Reed, 2007; Rusbult, 1983). People who experience a breakup usually invest fewer resources into their relationships, are typically less satisfied, and are more apt to seek out alternative partners, which results in romantic breakup (Rusbult, 1983). The participants in the study varied in their reports of deterioration, from different pre- and post- deterioration commitment changes, to single or multiple experiences of deterioration. However, a majority of participants reported increases in commitment after deterioration, suggesting that participants were able to resolve some of the issues involved with the deterioration experience. This pattern suggests that couples usually hit a “bump in the road” during their relationship resulting in declining commitment levels and ends with relationship maintenance. Not all (or any couple for that matter) will experience a relationship of ever increasing commitment. Many couples experience instability at some point in their relationship that results in attempts at mending the relationship or breaking up (Kellas, Bean, Cunningham, & Cheng, 2008; Reed, 2007). Also, males participants in my sample were older than females. This gender difference could be explained by the idea that men are typically older than their female counterparts (Breitman, Shackelford, & Block, 2004; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976).

Relationship Deterioration and the Four Characteristics

Through empirical and theoretical ideas, I hypothesized that spending less time with your partner, experiencing relational uncertainty, and/or each member of the relationship having some participation with an alternative partner are related to

decreasing levels of commitment, supporting the definition of relationship deterioration. In my sample, *individuals* and *couples* reported more frequent statements of all four characteristics during, rather than before, commitment levels declined. However, the level of intensity of these statements did not differ between deterioration and the period prior to deterioration for either *individuals* or *couples*. Participants who experience any or a combination of decreased time with their partner, relational uncertainty, or participation with another romantic interest undergo relationship deterioration, despite how strong the deterioration characteristics were.

The higher frequency amounts of decreased interactions, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners as associated with relationship deterioration is supported by the literature. First, spending less time with a romantic partner, through decreasing the amount of time you communicate or participate in activities together is associated with decreases in commitment (Welch & Rubin, 2002). When couples are increasing the instances in which they are avoiding each other, it is difficult to establish a strong connection with a romantic partner. My results revealed that how partners avoided each other did not matter, but the number of times avoidance occurred did matter. Not answering a phone call when it is usually answered and avoiding going on a date with your partner, when in abundance, describe deterioration. Individuals in our sample may cope with this characteristic of deterioration by attributing the decrease in commitment as an example that they or their partner are not as committed to the relationship. For example, an individual's partner does not send them a text message promptly after class (when they normally would) leading the original participant to ascribe this low intense example of decreased interactions that their partner must not want to talk to them or they

are doing something more important than talking with them. Thus, the original participant compensates with this uncomfortable feeling by decreasing how committed they are to the relationship. For couples, when an individual is unable to spend time with the other, one or both couple members may attempt to make sense of the experience by thinking that commitment is no longer as high as they thought it was. In general, the results of this study provide support that frequency, and not intensity of decreased interactions is characteristic of relationship deterioration.

Relational uncertainty was also related to relationship deterioration, despite the intensity of the example. My results support the idea that relational uncertainty is related to decreasing commitment levels (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Surra & Bohman, 1991). When couples become uncertain about their romantic partner, their self in terms of the relationship, or the relationship in general, individuals begin to decrease their commitment to their relationship. If any doubts are present during the course of a romantic relationship, individuals may cope with this deterioration characteristic by attributing faults to their partner or blame themselves, resulting in steady declines in commitment (Kelley, 1987). However, different experiences of relational uncertainty did not differentiate between pre-deterioration and deterioration. The different components of relational uncertainty (self, partner, and relationship), each influence an individual on varying levels. For some individuals a specific doubt concerning a partner's particular behavior during a specific event may influence commitment more than another individual who is uncertain about the future of the relationship. The prior individual may decrease commitment based their partners behavior because they are worried about how the couple is perceived by their peers. The latter individual may only decrease commitment slightly

because they are unsure how their relationship will fair long-distance. Each example of relationship uncertainty varies among individuals, which leads to different attributions, suggesting dissimilar ways of decreasing commitment (Kelley, 1987). There is no prior research that has attempted to separate relational uncertainty into different intensity components. Although the impact of relational uncertainty varies across individuals, the higher amounts of this characteristic differentiate the process of relationship deterioration from other relationship processes.

Alternative partners, both self and partner, are characteristic of relationship deterioration through decreasing commitment levels. When an individual or their romantic partner become involved with another person in a romantic way, whether it is imagined or suspected, an individual experiences a decrease in commitment to the relationship (Rusbult, 1983). When individuals in this study commented on any type of involvement, such as thinking about another individual romantically to kissing someone else who wasn't the original romantic partner, decreases in commitment occurred. The more an individual discusses the entertaining experiences they had with someone other than their partner, or the more often the participant describes suspicions about their partner's romantic intentions, the more this individual realizes that they are not committed to the relationship as they originally had been. Therefore, alternative partners are factors associated with relationship deterioration. Looking elsewhere for romantic alternatives, no matter how benign, is associated with deterioration.

In general, changes in the amount of each characteristic of deterioration are more operative than intensity. Intensity implies abrupt or sudden changes in commitment, whereas the frequency implies more steady declines in commitment. Thus, deterioration

begins when an increase in the amount of the deterioration characteristics occurs, resulting in perceived steady declines. The consequences of changes in intensity are addressed in the following section.

Relationship Deterioration and Breakup

Because deterioration is defined as decreases in commitment, when a breakup occurs, there is little commitment remaining in the relationship. In order to confirm this conjecture, in my study, I measured frequency and intensity of the deterioration characteristics to test for associations with breakup. For my sample, increases in frequency of alternative partners, or increases in intensity of any of the deterioration characteristics lead to the breakup of a relationship, and the end of changes in commitment. Whereas frequency was a better predictor of declining commitment levels, intensity was highly associated with breakup.

When a couple reported more frequent statements about their declining commitment, specifically reasons concerning alternative partners, individuals were more likely to break up with their romantic partner. Being involved with another romantic partner is a common reason for individuals to break up with their partners (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Reed, 2007; Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002; Sprecher, 1994). In a study of young adults, Shackelford and colleagues (2002) described the dilemma that romantic partners face when infidelity occurs within a relationship, whether emotional or physical. Participants, specifically males, were less likely to forgive a sexual infidelity rather than an emotional fidelity leading to the end of the relationship. Reed (2007), in her model of breaking up, described how several individuals ended their relationship due to physical infidelities, including hugging, kissing, and having sexual intercourse,

although some partners re-entered these relationships. In general, the idea that breakups occur with higher amounts of reports of alternative partners has been established theoretically and empirically, and this study supports this literature.

However, the concept that more intense statements of the four characteristics of deterioration predict breakup, adds new information to the process of relationship deterioration. The likelihood that a couple would break up due to more extreme instances of the deterioration characteristics ranged from 37% (relational uncertainty), to 74% (alternative partners for the participant's partner) compared to individuals who described low intense scores of these characteristics. These results support concepts of Rusbult's (1980, 1983) investment model of commitment. When an individual invests less time and resources into their relationships, such as decreasing their interactions, results in less commitment, which is predictive of breakup. When an individual puts more resources towards another romantic prospect, than this individual typically seeks to end their current relationship in order to seek a new one (Rusbult, 1980, 1983). The sample for this study appears to have a "no tolerance policy" concerning infidelity. When their partner participated with a romantic alternative as portrayed in higher intensity scores, the relationship will most likely end soon. The odds ratio of individual's partner's involvement with alternative partners with breaking up is also consistent with the empirical literature (Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002; VanderDrift, Agnew, & Wilson, 2009).

Results from this study reveal that high intensity statements of all the deterioration characteristics predicted breakup, but did not reveal differences between pre-deterioration and deterioration. An explanation for these results involves the

examination of the theory of gradual versus sudden breakups as presented by Davis (1973). Davis described two different methods of relationship termination, one in which a slow gradual decline in commitment occurs until the relationship ends. The other pattern is described as more sudden (he terms this style as “sudden death”) and is usually presented in a high conflict altercation (Davis, 1973). In terms of alternative partners, if an individual within the relationship were to hear or discover an infidelity within the relationship, they will most likely seek a solution to this problem, most likely by breaking up with their current partner as soon as possible, similar to the “sudden death” breakup (Davis, 1973; Shackelford, Buss, & Bennett, 2002). In this example, there is little time to experience or describe a decline in commitment, but easier to end the relationship. When the initial participant becomes involved with an alternative partner or describes their partner’s involvement with an alternative partner, the participant is more likely to end the relationship suddenly rather than letting the relationship run its course (Davis, 1973). In terms of the other characteristics, if an individual in a relationship suddenly was purposefully avoiding their partner (high intensity) and both participants become aware of the avoidance, they are more likely to end their relationship, ending their commitment with each other, rather than remain with each other and continue to let their commitment decrease (Welch & Rubin, 2002). In this study, more participants broke up with their partner in more intense situations of these characteristics during deterioration rather than attempt to stay together.

Relationship deterioration, as defined as decreased commitment and characterized by frequent statements of decreased interactions, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners, resembles the characteristics of a gradual breakup. Individuals describing more

experiences of the deterioration characteristics reveal declines in commitment, but these decreases are not enough to instigate a breakup. With each increase in the amount of the characteristics, the more deterioration occurs, making it appear similar to Davis' (1973) of a gradual breakup. This style results in slowly declining commitment and adjusting to negative experiences within the relationship. Therefore, when an individual experiences increased amounts of relational uncertainty, commitment will continue to decline. Once an intense statement of relational uncertainty occurs, a breakup is more likely to occur. Thus, more frequent, less intense statements appear to resemble characteristics of gradual breakups and deterioration; whereas, more intense, less frequent experiences of the characteristics of deterioration may resemble sudden breakup, with little to no discussion of declining commitment.

Characteristics of Deterioration and Post-deterioration

The consequences of deterioration were further explored by analyses concerning how frequency and intensity of the deterioration characteristics could explain an individual's decision to increase their commitment to the relationship or maintain commitment levels (if they did not breakup). Yet nothing was predictive of what occurred after deterioration. Whether an individual described several or more intense examples of decreased interactions, relational uncertainty or alternative partners, the characteristics of deterioration did not explain whether a couple decided to attempt to repair their relationship through increasing commitment or leave the problem alone by remaining in the relationship and allowing commitment to remain steady. Although relationship maintenance is not within the scope of this paper, these results appear to describe that intensity and frequency of the characteristics are not predictive of changes in

commitment after deterioration. In times of conflict, couples face different strategies and approaches for deciding whether or not to remain in the relationship or improve commitment to the relationship by working with their partner to address relationship issues and problems. These strategies, however, typically depend on an individual's personality, resolution approach, their investment to the relationship, as well as other factors not measured in this study (Dailey, Hampel, & Roberts, 2010; Dindia & Baxter, 1987; Feinlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990). Feinlee and colleagues (1990) found that family and social network contribute to an individual's decision to maintain a relationship, improving the relationship, or ending the relationship during times of relationship conflict. Another way to view these results is to view the characteristics as more distinctive of relationship deterioration than relationship maintenance. Because frequency and intensity do not associate with post-deterioration commitment changes, these characteristics strengthen the definition of deterioration and further differentiate deterioration from other relationship processes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the uniqueness of this study in examining relationship deterioration during the course of a romantic relationship, this investigation was not without limitations. First, the presence of the characteristics of deterioration was not asked directly to the participants. Participants only mentioned them if the characteristic was involved in changes in commitment. This may have decreased the chances that a participant would have discussed the deterioration characteristic, because individuals may experience various forms of the characteristics but not mention them during this study. Although, if participants were asked specifically about the deterioration characteristics

during changes in commitment, an increase the accuracy of measuring deterioration may occur, but this method may prime participants to focus more on the relationship deterioration characteristics rather than the exact reasons for changes in commitment. Second, measuring intensity for relational uncertainty was difficult to conceptualize as it is more of an internal cognition, rather than an overt behavior. Assigning intensity scores to different thoughts is more complicated than assigning intensity scores to different behaviors, such as decreasing interactions or alternative partners. It may have been better to capture this characteristic through survey methods or daily diaries rather than externally through narrative coding; however, this approach would also prime participants to overestimate the amount of uncertainty they may actually be experiencing.

One limitation of the data collection is that intensity scores were only provided if a participant's statement described a characteristic of deterioration. Participants may have been experiencing an intense experience on one of the four characteristics but it may not have been captured because the participant did not mention it when describing changes in commitment. This issue, however, is also present in any self-report, where individuals don't report accurate information or not enough information (Ash, 2009; Bradfield & Wells, 2005). This study utilized censored data – both right-censored, where individuals may have experienced deterioration prior to the study, and left-censored, resulting in the study ending before some couples could break up, while some couples may have gotten back together after the study ended (Dailey et al., 2009; Reed, 2007). This limitation decreased the number of breakups that occurred as well as the number of individuals reporting their first deterioration experience.

Capturing multiple deterioration patterns was a limitation due to the censored nature of the data. In this study, it cannot be determined if the first deterioration occurred during the study or if a period of deterioration occurred before or afterwards.

Differentiating between initial experiences of deterioration and subsequent experiences were not measured due to the nature of the data. Nonetheless, this study provides a snapshot of a period of deterioration that an individual may experience during the course of any relationship, which contributes to the literature on relationship dissolution. Future studies are encouraged to extend the experimental timeframe as well as following both participants post-breakup. I encourage future research to capture other characteristics that may further differentiate relationship deterioration from breaking up (and other relational processes) through measuring other individual and dyadic variables, such as particular behaviors, personality traits, conflicts, and relationship maintenance strategies.

In conclusion, I was able to clearly define and distinguish relationship deterioration based on models of breakup by means of identification of characteristics that occur when commitment declines. These four characteristics in abundance signify that an individual is experiencing relationship deterioration. When these four characteristics increase in intensity, the couple is more likely to break up. My findings should be viewed as a possible framework for future studies to further differentiate this period from breaking up and view deterioration as its own process during the entire development and dissolution of romantic relationships.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables Across Deteriorating and Not-deteriorating Groups by Gender.

		Deteriorated (N= 255)		Not Deteriorated (N = 177)	
		Males	Females	Males	Females
<i>N</i>		115 (44.9)	140 (55.1)	101 (57.1)	76 (42.9)
Age		24.50	22.89	24.09	23.37
Race		(3.43) ^a	(3.32) ^b	(3.83) ^a	(3.69) ^{a,b}
Religion	White	88 (48.4)	94 (51.6)	71 (55.0)	58 (45.0)
	Not-White	27 (37.0)	46 (63.0)	30 (62.5)	18 (37.5)
Religion	Catholic	37 (41.6)	52 (58.4)	35 (54.7)	29 (45.3)
	Protestant	64 (66.0)	33 (34.0)	44 (66.7)	22 (33.3)
	Atheist/None	27 (32.9)	55 (67.1)	22 (46.8)	25 (53.2)
Education	High school/GED or less	24 (42.9)	18 (57.1)	14 (63.6)	8 (36.3)
	Some college	40 (37.7)	66 (62.3)	51 (59.3)	35 (40.7)
	College Degree	44 (49.4)	43 (50.6)	25 (51.0)	24 (49.0)
	Post College	7 (35.0)	13 (65.0)	11 (55.0)	9 (45.0)
		26.40	25.82	29.75	30.70
Relationship Length		(26.29)	(23.66)	(22.34)	(23.58)

Note. Superscripts represent mean differences based on Bonferroni statistics.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Individuals and Couples Experiencing Deterioration, Separately

		Couples		Individuals	
		Males	Females	Males	Females
<i>N</i>		90	90	25	50
Age		24.41 (3.51)	23.38 (3.46)	24.76(3.09)	22.00 (2.86)
Race					
	White	71 (78.9)	64 (71.1)	17 (68.0)	30 (60.0)
	Not-White	19 (21.1)	26 (28.9)	8 (32.0)	20 (40.0)
Religion					
	Catholic	29 (32.3)	35 (38.8)	8 (32.0)	17 (24.0)
	Protestant	39 (43.3)	31 (34.5)	12 (48.0)	9 (18.0)
	Athiest/No Religious Beliefs	22 (24.4)	24 (26.7)	5 (20.0)	24 (58.0)
Education					
	Highschool/GED or less	20 (22.2)	12 (13.3)	4 (16.0)	6 (12.0)
	Some college	32 (35.6)	39 (43.4)	8 (32.0)	27 (54.0)
	College Degree	35 (38.9)	29 (32.2)	9 (36.0)	14 (28.0)
	Post College	3 (3.3)	10 (11.1)	4 (16.0)	3 (6.0)
Relationship Length		26.50 (27.25)	25.00 (25.89)	26.04 (23.00)	27.31 (19.17)
Breakup					
	Yes	27 (30.0)	27 (30.0)	5 (20.0)	14 (28.0)
	No	63 (70.0)	63 (70.0)	20 (80.0)	36 (72.0)
Pre-deterioration					
	Started with deterioration	19 (21.1)	29 (32.2)	7 (28.0)	12 (24.0)
	Steady levels of commitment	42 (46.7)	27 (30.0)	10 (40.0)	17 (34.0)
	Increasing levels of commitment	29 (32.2)	34 (37.8)	8 (32.0)	21 (42.0)
Number of Deterioration Experiences					
	Singular Instance of Deterioration	58 (64.4)	53 (58.9)	13 (52.0)	34 (68.0)
	Multiple periods of Deterioration	32 (35.6)	37 (41.1)	12 (48.0)	16 (32.0)
Post-deterioration					
	Ended while still deteriorating	13 (14.4)	14 (15.6)	5 (20.0)	6 (12.0)
	Flat levels of commitment	13 (14.4)	12 (13.3)	1 (4.0)	4 (8.0)
	Increasing levels of commitment	64 (71.1)	64 (71.1)	19 (76.0)	40 (80.0)

Table 3

Frequency Characteristics of Participants Reporting Deterioration

		Deterioration (N= 255)	
		Men	Women
Breakup Status			
	Yes	32 (27.8)	42 (30.0)
	No	83 (72.2)	98 (70.0)
Pre-deterioration			
	Started with deterioration	25 (21.7)	41 (29.3)
	Steady levels of commitment	53 (46.1)	45 (32.1)
	Increasing levels of commitment	37 (32.2)	54 (38.6)
Number of Deterioration Experiences			
	Singular Instance of Deterioration	71 (61.7)	87 (62.1)
	Multiple periods of Deterioration	44 (38.3)	53 (37.9)
Post-deterioration			
	Ended while still deteriorating	17 (14.8)	19 (13.6)
	Flat levels of commitment	14 (12.2)	17 (12.1)
	Increasing levels of commitment	84 (73.0)	104 (74.3)

Table 4

The Frequency of the Four Characteristics of Deterioration Versus Pre-deterioration for Individuals and Couples

	Decreased Interactions	Relational Uncertainty	Alternative- Partner Self	Alternative Partner- Partner
Couples				
Fixed Effects				
Intercept	-.22 (.24)	-.12 (.23)	-.02 (.17)	-.01 (.13)
Pre- versus Deterioration	.71 (.13)***	.90 (.13)***	.42 (.09)***	.24 (.07)***
Gender	.12 (.13)	.09 (.13)	.08 (.10)	.02 (.07)
Relationship Length	.00(.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Variance Components				
Within-person variance	.87 (.93)	.87 (.94)	.47 (.68)	.54 (.29)
Within-couple variance	.00 (.03)	.00 (.06)	.00 (.02)	.00 (.05)
Between-couple variance	.07 (.26)	.00 (.02)	.03 (.17)	.00 (.01)
Individuals				
Fixed Effects				
Intercept	.09 (.16)	.12 (.10)	.10 (.13)	-.01 (.04)
Pre- versus Deterioration	.62 (.17)***	.81 (.11)***	.43 (.12)***	.09 (.04)*
Relationship Length	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Variance Components				
Within-person variance	.66 (.81)	.27 (.54)	.31 (.56)	.04 (.20)
Between-person variance	.00 (.07)	.00 (.02)	.12 (.34)	.02 (.14)

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 5.

The Difference in Intensity Across Deterioration versus Pre-deterioration

	Couples	Individuals
Fixed Effects		
Decreased Interactions (reference)	1.71 (.30)***	1.62 (.28)***
Deterioration or Predeterioration	-.06 (.21)	.30 (.25)
Relational Uncertainty	.10 (.11)	.25 (.19)
Alternative Partners-Self	.05 (.14)	.00 (.22)
Alternative Partners-Partner	.30 (.18)	.22 (.35)
Relationship Length	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)
Variance Components		
Within-person variance	.42 (.65)	.49 (.70)
Within-couple variance	.12 (.35)	---
Between-couple variance	.00 (.04)	---
Between-person variance	---	.07 (.26)

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 6.

Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Frequency and Intensity Predicting Breakup for Couples (n = 180) and Individuals (n = 75), Controlling for Length of Relationship

Predictor	Deterioration		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>e^B</i>
Frequency			
Month 1	-.82	.49	.44
Month 2	-.58	.48	.56
Month 3	-1.62*	.67	.20
Month 4	-1.30*	.60	.27
Month 5	-1.98*	.78	.14
Month 6	-1.93*	.78	.15
Month 7	-.10	.45	.90
Decreased Interactions	.11	.10	1.12
Relational Uncertainty	.15	.11	1.16
Alternative Partner – Self	.43**	.15	1.54
Alternative Partner - Partner	.44**	.15	1.56
Relationship Length	.01	.01	1.01
Constant	-2.88***		
χ^2		18.05***	
<i>df</i>		4	
Intensity			
Month 1	-.97	.51	.37
Month 2	-.69	.49	.50
Month 3	-1.74**	.68	.18
Month 4	-1.41*	.61	.24
Month 5	-2.08**	.79	.13
Month 6	-2.04**	.79	.13
Month 7	-.11	.46	.90
Decreased Interactions	.47***	.14	1.56
Relational Uncertainty	.31*	.14	1.37
Alternative Partner – Self	.46**	.16	1.58
Alternative Partner - Partner	.55***	.17	1.74
Relationship Length	.01	.01	1.01
Constant	-3.47***		
χ^2		48.852***	
<i>df</i>		12	
% broken up at end of study		30.0%	

Note: e^B = exponentiated *B*, the odds ratios.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 7
*Predicting Increases in Commitment or Maintaining Commitment After
Deterioration*

	B	S.E.	OR ^a
Frequency of Decreased Interactions	-.209	.136	.811
Frequency of Relational Uncertainty	-.171	.148	.842
Frequency of Alternative Partners-Self	-.332	.183	.718
Frequency of Alternative Partners-Partner	-.209	.255	.811
Constant	1.557***	.295	4.742
Intensity of Decreased Interactions	-.254	.174	.776
Intensity of Relational Uncertainty	-.176	.134	.839
Intensity of Alternative Partners-Self	-.362	.200	.696
Intensity of Alternative Partners-Partner	-.250	.236	.779
Constant	1.755***	.349	5.782

Note. $p < .001$.

^a OR = Odds Ratio.

Appendix A

Coding Manual

Introduction

The purpose of this coding manual is to help investigate three characteristics that are related to relationship deterioration. Please utilize this manual to understand how to code for the three characteristics. Codes will be measured by how often they appear in the transcript and by their level of intensity. Below are descriptions of the three codes, examples of the three codes, and how to measure intensity of each characteristic.

You will be reading transcripts of interviews with participants about the changes in their chance of marriage graph. Individuals were asked to graph their chance of marriage on a 0% to 100% scale and track the changes in this commitment over time. After each line was drawn that designated a change in the commitment to marriage, the interviewer asked, “Tell me, in as specific terms as possible, what happened here from [date] to [date] that made the chance of marriage go [up/down] [__%]?” Participants were asked, “Is there anything else that happened...” until they said, “No.” These two questions provided an account of the reasons for the change in commitment that are recorded as transcripts, which will be used for this coding manual.

Each transcript has the interviewee’s statements broken down into thought units, which are separated by a “/”. When coding a thought unit (any statement between “/” marks; e.g., “/we talked a lot/”), only use the information included within the thought unit to decide on what to code. Try to avoid letting statements before and after the thought unit bias your coding of each individual thought unit. The only statements that should be coded are answers to “why questions.” For example, participants’ responses when the

interviewer asks participants to describe why their chance of marriage changed, and not responses when the interviewer asks, “what was the chance of marriage?”

Directions for coding frequency: Read each Phase 2 transcript thoroughly and identify thought units that are examples of each code (decreased interactions with partner, relational uncertainty, and alternative partners). After reading the entire transcript, record the total number of thought units that represent that code.

Directions for coding intensity: After coding frequency, refer back to each example that was coded during the frequency task. Score each example on a 1 to 3 scale as described below.

Decreased Interactions with Partner

Description: Statements that reflect spending less time with one’s partner, communicating less with one’s partner, or other semblances of decreases in the amount of any kind of interaction. The decreases in the amount of interaction can be physical interactions, communication, or both. Coinciding with Duck’s (1981) idea of decreased interactions, statements by the participants that reflect a decrease in intimacy are also included in this code. Examples of this may include decreasing time participating in physical activities, such as going on a date, or sexual activities, such as intercourse.

Frequency

= Total number of thought units that represents an example of decrease interaction with partner from Phase 2 transcripts during relationship deterioration. Coders will record the number of examples in pre-deterioration transcripts and in deterioration transcripts.

Statements include decreasing the amount of time an individual spends with a partner. Examples of this code include thinking about not wanting to spend time with an individual's partner.

Examples:

“She was not speaking to me, I mean I said hey, are you going out tonight, and she was like, I'm not talking to you”

“But [change of marriage] dropped because we started spending more time with our friends instead of with each other”

Not Examples of Amount of Interaction with Partner:

“We're apart sometimes I guess”

“We were living in 2 different apartments”

Why are these thought units not examples of the amount of interaction with partner?

Physical separation from a partner or a lack of interaction between partners does not represent a decrease in the amount of time spent with the partner. Simply being separated from one's partner or not living together does not mean that the couple is spending less time with each other. The first two non-examples above describe physical separation from an individual's partner that does not appear intentional. The two correct examples list a decrease in the amount of time spent with partner, where one or both of the individuals are decreasing their interaction with each other, by means of communication or physical activity.

Intensity

1 = Low intensity mentions of decreased interactions with partner: Mentions decreased time spent with partner or communicating less with partner, but the decrease is episodic

or uncommon. This means that individuals describe a single instance of a time when their partner decreased the amount of time they spent together or didn't talk. Statements of decreased interactions are of low severity. What this means is that the instance of decreased interactions isn't pervasive and may not be a cause of concern, such as the example below. The decreased interactions may appear unintentional. Statements scoring a 1 reflect a possible beginning of a couple decreasing their interactions with one another.

Ex. "I guess we weren't talking on the phone as much"

Statements of decreased interactions reflect a single instance of an individual or partner spending less time or talking less with one's partner. Different from a 2, a 1 represents a single instance of decreased interactions.

Ex. "I felt bad because I felt at that point in time she wasn't there as much as I was used to"

In this last example, not only does the decreased interaction appear episodic, but the individual states that he was unaccustomed to seeing his partner less. This reveals low severity because it seems like an abnormal behavior that may be unintentional.

2 = Moderate intensity mentions of decreased interactions with partner: Statements reveal a decrease in the amount of time spent with partner, either physically or by means of communication, where the decrease is more severe than a 1, but only moderately. Cues that the decrease is more severe than a 1 code include revealing that the decreased interactions are becoming more recurrent, such as talking or seeing an individual's partner fewer times over the course of the relationship. Individuals describe how they or their partner are beginning to make a habit of not talking or seeing each other, but they are not completely avoiding each other.

Ex. “I felt that [he] was talking to me less and less over the summer”

3 = High intensity mentions of decreased interactions with partner: Statements of decreased amounts of time with partner represent the highest level of severity. Statements reflect that an individual or their partner are avoiding each other or are no longer speaking. Avoiding is more severe than not talking as much because individuals no longer want to see or talk with their partner. For a score of a 2, not talking as much implies that there is still some communication or interaction between the two partners, which is less severe than completely avoiding the partner. Intentionally avoiding a romantic partner reveals a high severity of decreased interactions. Statements can also describe how individuals want to escape the relationship. For this score, the decreased interactions are habitual within the relationship where spending time with one’s partner or not communicating anymore is occurring.

Ex. “We used to talk on the phone a lot, but lately I think she has been avoiding my calls”

Statements that reflect that communication and interacting with one another ceases, as opposed to talking or seeing each other less, should receive a score of a 3. Statements reveal that the two partners are completely differentiated from one another.

Ex. “and we weren’t, um, speaking”

Relational Uncertainty

Description: Any reference to doubts about the relationship or being unsure about the current state of the relationship. Statements can include self, partner, or relationship uncertainty. Self uncertainty statements reflect that the participant is having doubts or questions about their own involvement in the relationship. Statements could include the

participant questioning if the participant wants to stay in the relationship or if the participant wants the relationship to last. Partner uncertainty includes questions or doubts that individuals have about their dating partner's feelings about the relationship. Examples may include questioning if the partner is committed to the relationship or how important the relationship is to the participant's partner. Relationship uncertainty encompasses questions about the nature of the relationship as a whole, including whether or not the relationship is authentically romantic, whether both people feel the same way, or if the relationship will work out in the long run. Statements that convey any aspect of relational uncertainty, whether it is self, partner, or relationship, should be included in this code.

Frequency

= Total number of thought units that represents an example of relational uncertainty with partner from Phase 2 transcripts during relationship deterioration. Coders will record the number of examples in pre-deterioration transcripts and in deterioration transcripts.

Statements refer to doubts, questioning, or feeling unsure about the relationship. These statements can represent self, partner, or relational uncertainty. Statements also include confusion about the current state of the relationship or about a partner's motives. Any statement that describes questioning the relationship, whether it is in the present or the past, is an appropriate example of relational uncertainty.

Examples:

"I was confused, just kinda, about what was going on in her mind about us"

"I had questions about her, you know"

“Now maybe [the relationship], it’s not as beneficial as it was”

Not Examples of Relational Uncertainty:

“I feel like he would be interested in marrying me”

“I don’t want to marry somebody that you know, is gonna be like that and get drunk”

Why are these not examples of relational uncertainty?

When an individual describes decisiveness, the statement is not considered uncertain. Examining the first incorrect example, the individual has made the decision that their partner is not adequate, although the individual may have been uncertain prior to this statement. Statements that concern doubt in general should not be considered as examples of relationship uncertainty, such as the last incorrect statement. Raters should make sure to refrain from inferring anything about situations that may represent statements of uncertainty. The above correct examples reflect explicit comments about doubts, questions, or confusion concerning the relationship. The correct examples above describe a participant’s uncertainty regarding their partner’s behavior or thoughts that impact the relationship, which reflect partner uncertainty, an integral element of relational uncertainty. Also, statements concerning the relationship that use the word “maybe” would qualify as questioning the relationship.

Intensity

1 = Low intensity mentions of relational uncertainty: Statements reflect having doubts about an individual’s partner or being uncertain about their own behavior, thoughts, feelings, or actions. Statements display confusion about the partner, where the uncertainty

is narrow and specific about a quality or behavior of the partner. The uncertainty is based on a singular instance in time and not across the duration of the relationship.

Ex. “Eventually that’s how I started havin’ my doubts just cause the way she acted that night and the way that I acted”

2 = Moderate intensity mention of relational uncertainty: Moderate intensity relational uncertainty can be identified in multiple ways. First, thought units that reflect uncertainty or doubts in which participants question the pathway of the relationship should be coded as a 2. Examples of this involve questioning the next step in a relationship, such as moving in together. However, questioning marrying an individual’s partner is distinct from doubting the path of the relationship. In the original study, participants were asked about their commitment to marriage inferring that marriage is a positive outcome of relationships in relationships. Yet, if participants had doubts about marriage in general, the statement should receive a 2. But if the statement refers to questioning whether or not to marry their partner, the statement will receive a score of a 3.

Ex. “I’m not sure if we would be able to stay a couple once we moved in together”

Ex. “between those two dates I had my doubts about uh, uh, eventually marrying.”

Unlike statements that reference a singular instance that created questions, which would score a 1, thought units that resemble more pervasive doubts concerning the relationship or one’s partner based on multiple incidents should be coded a 2. Pervasive doubts can be described as persistent doubts about any aspect of the relationship, either of the partner or the relationship’s future. Unlike a 3, moderate intensity (2) statements focus on the

relationship and its path rather than the desire to continue in the relationship. Statements question the general direction of the relationship.

Ex. “I’m just not real sure where the relationship’s going?”

Finally, statements coded as a 2 may reference questioning the nature of the relationship or the seriousness of it.

Ex. “then I got to thinkin’ about our relationship and wondered, if we could make it last or if it was a serious relationship.”

3 = High intensity mention of relational uncertainty: Statements include directly questioning the desire to remain in the relationship. Statements reflect questions about wanting or desiring to continue in the relationship, by either the participant or their partner. Statements coded as a 3 may also reveal doubts about staying in the relationship or if the partner is right for the participant. Also, since the purpose of the original study was measuring commitment to marriage, if a participant questions marrying their partner, or whether their partner is the right one to marry, then the statement receives a score of a 3. If the statement reflects a question about marriage as a step or questioning the basic principle of marriage, the statement would receive a score of a 2.

Ex. “I’m not, not sure if I want to marry [her].”

Ex. “I just was, was confused about, well whether I wanted to spend the rest of my life in this relationship.”

In order to garner a score of a 3, an individual questions the value of the relationship, compatibility between the partners, and future of the relationship. Where a 1 reflects general uncertainty caused by a specific behavior or action and a 2 demonstrates doubts

about where the relationship is headed, a 3 describes concerns about wanting to be or remain in the relationship.

Ex. “I just started questioning if I really wanted to stay in the relationship”

Ex. “I’m not sure he’s the one for me”

Alternative Partners

Description: Alternative dating partners include any real, imagined, past or present partner other than the partner in the relationship. Any statement that references active, anticipated, imagined, or desired involvement with another person should be coded as alternative partners. This code is broken down into two subcategories: self – alternative partners (referencing alternative partners for the individual being interviewed) and partner – alternative partners (referring to alternative partners to one’s significant other in the study).

Self – Alternative Partners

Description: The idea of self – alternative partners is encompassed when the individual being interviewed discusses their romantic involvement, whether cognitively or physically, with an individual other than their current partner. This also includes showing interest in more than one individual, stating an interest in dating other people, or physically engaging with another person in a romantic way, such as flirting or kissing.

Frequency

= Total number of thought units that represents an example of alternative partners – self with partner from Phase 2 transcripts during relationship deterioration. Coders will record the number of examples in pre-deterioration transcripts and in deterioration transcripts.

Statements refer to another individual, either explicitly or implicitly, as a threat to the relationship. A threat could be conveyed in multiple ways. First, an individual separate from the current relationship may have a romantic interest with the individual being interviewed.

Ex. “While I still had feelings for, for my guy, this guy...Paul kept asking me out”.

Also, threat can be in the form of interaction with others that makes the participant consider alternatives to the relationship (i.e. breaking up and being single or dating other people).

Ex. “I met this sweet guy at a party with my friend and I wondered what it would be like to date him instead of [my boyfriend]”

Explicit statements of alternative partners include comments that convey being with or dating other people or a specific individual. Implicit statements include discussing thoughts about being with or dating people. An alternative partner can be an ex-boyfriend/girlfriend, or a new individual who is seen as a romantic interest. The statements can refer to actively talking, seeing, thinking, or being with an alternative partner that is considered a threat to the current relationship. Also, if statements reveal that an individual has *ever* cheated on the *other*, then the thought unit is considered an example of self – alternative partners.

Examples:

“The thing is, I, I was just dating this guy for a little, this other guy for a little while”

Not examples of Self – Alternative Partners:

“I talked to my ex-boyfriend”

Why are these statements not examples of self – alternative partners?

Descriptions that lack detail about the relationship between two individuals should not be counted as an example of self-alternative partners. Raters should refrain from making any inferences concerning the context of alternative partners. Unless the individual describes an individual as a possible threat or alternative to the relationship, then the example should not be considered an example of self-alternative partners. In the incorrect example above, not enough information is provided to code it as self-alternative partners. If this example reflected consideration of another romantic partner or a romantic threat to the relationship, without inferring details of the situation, such as the correct example, then the incorrect example would represent a code for self-alternative partners.

Intensity

1 = Low intensity mentions of self – alternative partners: Statements reflect the interviewed individual’s consideration of another person as an alternative partner. Specifically, statements discuss an individual’s questioning or comparing the current partner to an alternative partner. Statements also include consideration of anyone in the general population, rather than someone specific, as an alternative partner compared to their current partner. In general, statements refer the individual thinking about someone else as a possible future dating partner. There is no active pursuit of an alternative partner in this code. Thinking about an alternative partner would garner a score of 1.

Ex. “I saw my old crush and we talked briefly and I was wonderin what it would be like if I was to date him instead”

Ex. “If a good looking guys [are] walking by you're gonna look at him and wonder about him”

2 = Moderate intensity mentions of self – alternative partners: Statements involve the initial signs of the interviewed individual actively pursuing an alternative partner. Initial signs involve meeting new people, flirting with an alternative partner, dancing with someone at a club, etc. An initial sign does not include anything sexual with an alternative partner, such as kissing or giving a back rub (which would score a 3). Unlike a 1, the interviewed individual is engaging with others that pose a threat to the relationship. Statements reveal that interaction with alternative partners is relatively new. Individuals describe how they are pursuing alternative partners, even if the individuals initially were not meant to be a threat to the relationship, such as the example below.

Ex. “I’ve just been going out and meeting more people, meeting more guys that, you know, I might be interested in”

3 = High intensity mention of self – alternative partners: The interviewed participant is regularly actively engaging with an alternative. Statements describe the habitual romantic experiences with someone other than the current partner, such as dating or sexual behaviors. Unlike a 2, individuals have pursued (an) alternative partner(s) more regularly rather than just beginning to pursue others. When the interviewed individual is living with, sleeping with, or doing anything that may reflect sexual activity (see first example below) with an alternative partner while in their current relationship, then the statement scores a 3. Any reference to cheating on their dating partner scores a 3.

Ex. “At this party, I had, actually made out with this other guy”

Partner – Alternative Partners

Description: The idea of partner – alternative partners is encompassed when an individual discusses their reactions or interpretations of a partner’s behavior as a sign that their partner wants to or is involved with someone else. This code is captured when the individual being interviewed discusses their partner’s interest, whether cognitively or physically, with another individual. These statements include an individual being suspicious or jealous of their partner’s romantic interactions and intentions with someone other than the current partner.

Frequency

= Total number of thought units that represents an example of alternative partners – partner with partner from Phase 2 transcripts during relationship deterioration. Coders will record the number of examples in pre-deterioration transcripts and in deterioration transcripts.

Statements refer to another individual, either explicitly or implicitly, as a threat to the relationship. A threat could be conveyed in multiple ways. First, an individual separate from the current relationship may have a romantic interest with the individual’s partner causing some interference.

Ex. “My best friend kept telling me how she still had feelings for my boyfriend”. Second, threat can be conveyed in statements that express that the partner is or may be romantically interested in someone else.

Ex. “I heard [my boyfriend] say that, that this girl was really hot” Finally, threat can be in the form of interaction with others that makes the partner consider alternatives to the relationship (i.e. breaking up and being single or dating other people).

Ex. “My boyfriend met this girl, and I heard him talking about it with his friends, and I thought he would rather date her than continue to stay with me”

Explicit statements of partner – alternative partners include comments that convey that the current dating partner is dating other people or a specific individual. Implicit statements include discussing thoughts about being with or dating people. The statements can refer to the current partner actively talking, seeing, thinking, or being with an alternative partner that is considered a threat to the current relationship. Also, if statements reveal that their partner has *ever* cheated on the individual being interviewed, then the thought unit is considered an example of partner-alternative partners.

Examples:

“Um, I guess I thought things were through ‘cause he was seeing someone else.”

Not examples of Partner – Alternative Partners:

“He bought her a souvenir”

Why is this statement not an example of partner – alternative partners?

Descriptions that lack detail about the relationship between two individuals should not be counted as an example of partner – alternative partners. Raters should refrain from making any inferences concerning the context of alternative partners. Unless the participant describes an individual as a possible threat or alternative to the relationship, then the example should not be considered an example of partner-alternative partners. In the incorrect example above, not enough information is provided to code it as partner-alternative partners. If these examples reflected the current dating partner’s consideration of another romantic partner or a romantic threat to the relationship, without

inferring details of the situation, such as the correct example listed, then the incorrect example would represent a code for partner – alternative partners.

Intensity

1 = Low intensity mentions of partner – alternative partners: Statements reflect the interviewed individual's *partner's* consideration of another person as an alternative partner, whether the consideration is based on suspicion or not. Specifically, statements discuss the partner's questioning or comparing the interviewed individual to an alternative partner. Statements include consideration of anyone in the general population, rather than someone specific, as an alternative partner compared to the interviewed participant. In general, statements refer to the dating partner thinking about someone else as a possible future dating partner. There is no active pursuit of an alternative partner in this code. Thinking about an alternative partner would garner a score of 1.

Ex. "I know that he, he was, was thinking about her the entire time."

2 = Moderate intensity mention of partner – alternative partners: Statements involve the initial signs of an individual's partner's active pursuit of an alternative partner. Initial signs involve meeting new people, flirting with someone else, dancing with someone at a club, etc. An initial sign does not include anything sexual with an alternative partner, such as making out or giving a back rub. Unlike a 1, the dating partner is engaging with individuals that pose a threat to the relationship. Statements reveal that interaction with alternative partners is relatively new and may also reflect signs of jealousy, such as in the example below. Individuals describe how their partners are pursuing others, even if these other individuals initially were not meant to be a threat to the relationship.

Ex. “I was really pissed that she talked, or, yea talked to this one guy that I had never seen her with before.”

3 = High intensity mention of partner – alternative partners: The current dating partner is regularly engaging with someone other than the individual being interviewed. Statements describe the habitual romantic experiences with someone other than the interviewed participant, such as dating or sexual behaviors, which can also describe the interviewed participant’s jealousy. Unlike a 2, individuals have pursued alternative partners more regularly rather than just beginning to pursue others. When the individual is living with, sleeping with, or doing anything that may reflect sexual activity (see first example below) with an alternative partner while in their current relationship, then the statement scores a 3. Statements that reference their partner cheating on them, no matter at what point in the relationship, is considered an example of a 3.

Ex. “[She] had spent the night with somebody that I know.”

Ex. “Also, because, I mean, back in a year ago when he cheated on me, that really, I guess, it made me feel insecure, about marrying him.”

ADDENDUM: If a thought unit represents two codes, then record the thought unit as being an example of each code. Thus, one thought unit could receive an intensity code for decreased interactions, while also representing another intensity code for partner-alternative partners. For example, not only would the statement “I avoided my partner because he was flirting with another person” receive a frequency count for decreased interactions and partner-alternative partners, but the statement would also receive an intensity score of 3 for decreased interactions and a 2 for partner – alternative partners.

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